

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L JERUSALEM 0347

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, PBOR, IS, JO

SUBJ: WEST BANK POLITICAL FERMENT

1. SUMMARY. AS THE APRIL 12 DATE FOR WEST BANK MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS APPROACHES, POLITICAL FERMENT IS AT AN UNUSUALLY HIGH PITCH. INTERACTING ARE THE RADITIONAL LEADERS, PLO SUPPORTERS, BAATHISTS, PRO-HUSSEIN ELEMENTS, THE COMMUNISTS AND THE ISRAELIS. TO THIS VOLATILE COMBINATION HAS BEEN ADDED THE EMOTIONAL ISSUE OF JEWISH WORSHIP ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT (HARAM-ESH-SHARIF) (COMING ON TOP OF THE SETTLERS NEAR SEBASTIA) WHICH HAS SPARKED VIOLENT STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS WITH RELIABLY REPORTED IDF BRUTALITY IN RESPRESSING THEM AND WITH A CONSEQUENT GENERAL INCREASE IN TENSION ON THE WEST BANK OVER THE PAST FEW DAYS. ONE NEW PHENOMENON HAS BEEN THE RESIGNATION OF MAYORS AND MUNICIPAL COUNCILS IN NABLUS AND OTHER LOCALITIES IN PROTEST. PRESUMABLY, THE MUNICIPAL COUNCILS INVOLVED BELIEVE THAT THEIR ACTIONS WILL DRAMATIZE THEIR PROTEST BUT WILL NOT HAVE ADVERSE CONSEQUENCES FOR THE ARAB POPULATION GIVEN THE IMMINENCE OF ELECTIONS. DESPITE THE PRESENT TENSE AND UNSETTLED

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SITUATION, MOST OBSERVERS CURRENTLY EXPECT THE ISRAELIS WILL

PERMIT ELECTIONS TO TAKE PLACE AS SCHEDULED SINCE TO DO OTHERWISE WOULD RESULT IN GREATER UNREST IN THE OCCUPIED TERRITORY AND WOULD PROVOKE RENEWED EXTERNAL ARAB CLAIMS OF ISRAEL'S FAILURE TO CARRY OUT ITS OBLIGATIONS UNDER INTERNATIONAL LAW THE SITUATION IS FLUID BUT CERTAIN TRENDS ARE EVIDENT.
END SUMMARY.

2. WITH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS A MONTH AWAY, LONG-TERM OBSERVERS ARE STRUCK BY THE CONTINUING POLITICAL AND SOCIAL UNREST IN THE OCCUPIED WEST BANK. SINCE THE PREVIOUS ELECTIONS IN 1972, SIGNIFICANT NEW ELEMENTS ARE AT WORK AND, WHILE SOME TRENDS CAN BE DISCERNED, NO ONE CAN SAY FOR CERTAIN JUST WHAT THE OUTCOME WILL BE AND WHAT BROADER SIGNIFICANCE IT WILL HAVE. PSYCHOLOGICALLY, THE YOM KIPPUR WAR, THE RABAT SUMMIT DECISIONS, THE SUCCESSES OF THE PLO AT THE UN, THE VICTORY OF THE COMMUNISTS IN NAZARETH MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS, AND KING HUSSEIN'S ACTION IN POSTPONING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ARE ALL HAVING AN INFLUENCE, SOMETIMES AT CROSS PURPOSES. GIVEN THE PARTICULARISM OF THE TRADITIONAL ESTABLISHMENT ELITE AND THE DIFFERENT INFLUENCES AT PLAY, IT IS DIFFICULT TO GENERALIZE ABOUT "WEST BANK OPINION." THE ONE COMMON DENOMINATOR APPEARS TO BE FRUSTRATION AND A DESIRE TO GET RID OF THE ISRAELI OCCUPATION.

3. UNLIKE 1972, THE PLO IS URGING THE ELECTORATE TO VOTE AND IT IS BACKING CERTAIN CANDIDATES. ONE NOTICEABLE CHANGE IS THAT ALL CANDIDATES, ESTABLISHMENT ELITE AND OTHERWISE, VERBALLY SUPPORT THE PLO AS THE REPRESENTATIVE OF THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE. THE PLO, LIKE THE COMMUNISTS, IS HAMPERED BY THE FACT THAT POLITICAL PARTIES AND ORGANIZATIONS ARE OUTLAWED ON THE WEST BANK AND CANDIDATES OSTENSIBLY RUN IN AN INDIVIDUAL CAPACITY. THERE ARE INDICATIONS THAT THE TRADITIONAL LOCAL POWER BROKERS WHO PUT TOGETHER SLATES IN 1972 AND PREVIOUS ELECTIONS ARE REACHING AN ACCOMMODATION WITH THE PLO AND BAATHISTS (AND IN SOME LOCALITIES WITH THE COMMUNISTS) ON THE SLATES TO BE PRESENTED PRIOR TO THE END OF MARCH DEADLINE.

4. ALSO UNLIKE 1972, WHEN KING HUSSEIN REVERSED HIMSELF AND ENTERED THE LISTS BY PROXY AT THE ELEVENTH HOUR, HIS DECISION TO PARTICIPATE IN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS THEREBY AVOIDING A FORMAL SPLIT
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BETWEEN THE EAST AND WEST BANKS WAS INTERPRETED HERE AS A CLEAR INDICATION THAT HE WISHES TO PRESERVE HASHEMITE INFLUENCE ON THIS SIDE OF THE JORDAN WITH A VIEW TO PARTICIPATING IN EVENTUAL NEGOTIATIONS ON THE WEST BANK'S FUTURE. THERE ARE WIDESPREAD RUMORS THAT HUSSEIN HAS SENT LARGE SUMS ACROSS THE RIVER TO HELP ENSURE RE-ELECTION OR ELECTION OF HIS SYMPATHIZERS. THUS, THE NEGOTIATIONS ON SLATES ALLUDED TO ABOVE MUST ALSO RECKON WITH HUSSEIN'S CANDIDATES.

5. THERE ARE ADDITIONAL COMPLICATIONS TO AN ALREADY COMPLICATED SET-UP. THE ISRAELIS, BY GIVING WOMEN THE VOTE, HAVE GREATLY INCREASED THE POTENTIAL ELECTORATE, AND A HIGH PROPORTION OF ELIGIBLE VOTERS HAVE REGISTERED THIS TIME. (ESTIMATES VARY: MOST OBSERVERS EXPECT THE 1972 FIGURE OF 30,000 PLUS VOTERS TO BE DOUBLED. THE ISRAELIS STAT THE NUMBER WILL BE AS HIGH AS 85,000. AT THIS POINT, NO ONE KNOWS FOR CERTAIN.) PRESUMABLY, THE ISRAELI MOVE TO CHANGE THE JORDANIAN ELECTORAL LAW WAS MOTIVATED BY A DESIRE TO INCREASE THE STRENGTH OF THE TRADITIONAL LEADERSHIP. IN ADDITION, THERE IS THE RATHER UNCLEAR PROVISION FOR ALLOTING ADDITIONAL VOTES TO MEMBERS OF ONE'S FAMILY, TENANTS, AND PERHAPS EMPLOYEES BASED ON THE AMOUNT OF MUNICIPAL TAXES PAID (JERUSALEM 123). CLEARLY THIS ALSO WORKS TO THE BENEFIT OF THE TRADITIONAL LEADERS. MOREOVER, MAYORS ARE NOT ELECTED DIRECTLY BUT ARE APPOINTED BY THE CENTRAL GOVERNMENT (I.E. THE ISRAELIS), ON THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE NEW MUNICIPAL COUNCILS. WHILE TRADITIONALLY THE PERSON RECEIVING THE GREATEST NUMBER OF VOTES HAS BEEN SELECTED AS MAYOR, THERE HAVE BEEN INSTANCES WHEN SOMEONE ELSE HAS WOUND UP IN THE MAYOR'S CHAIR. FINALLY, MOST MUNICIPAL COUNCILS HAS EIGHT TO TEN ELECTED MEMBERS BUT THERE IS ALSO PROVISION FOR TWO APPOINTEE MEMBERS; ISRAELIS HAVE SO FAR NOT EXERCISED THIS OPTION HOWEVER.

6. WITH SO MANY FACTIONS ACTIVE, AND WITH STUDENT DEMONSTRATIONS OVER THE ISSUE OF JEWISH SERVICES ON THE TEMPLE MOUNT AND SETTLEMENT ON THE WEST BANK CONTINUING, AND WITH MUNICIPAL COUNCILS RESIGNING IN PROTEST.

PREDICTIONS ARE HAZARDOUS. NEVERTHELESS, SOME TRENDS HAVE EMERGED:

(A) IN THE MAIN CENTERS OF HEBRON AND NABLUS, NO REAL CHANGE IS CONFIDENTIAL

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CURRENTLY ANTICIPATED. AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED, SHEIKH JA'ABARI OF HEBRON SEEMS ASSURED OF REELECTION. THOUGH ACCUSED BY SOME OF BEING A COLLABORATOR WITH THE ISRAELIS AND/OR A VASSAL OF HUSSEIN, THE OLD SHEIKH IN REALITY IS MORE OF A FEUDAL CHIEFTAN WHO IS FOR HIMSELF, HIS CLAN AND THE HEBRON AREA. THE ONLY SIGNIFICANT CHANGE IS THAT THIS TIME THE SHEIKH IS BEING OPPOSED. IN NABLUS, IT NOW APPEARS THAT MAYOR MAZOUZ AL-MASRI MAY RUN AGAIN. IF NOT, HE WILL PROBABLY BE REPLACED BY HAMDI KANA'AN, LEADER OF ANOTHER NABLUS' WEALTHY FAMILIES.

(B) IN TOULKARM AND JERICHO, THE TWO INCUMBENT MAYORS WHO PUBLICLY SUPPORT THE PLO (HANNOUN AND BALI RESPECTIVELY) ARE EXPECTED TO BE REELECTED.

(C) IN RAMALLAH AND BETHLEHEM, THE OUTCOME SEEMS TO BE IN DOUBT.

IN THE FORMER, THE INCUMBENT MAYOR AND MILITANT PLO SUPPORTER KHALAF IS TRYING TO PUT TOGETHER A RELATIVELY BROADLY BASED NATIONALIST SLATE WHICH WILL INCLUDE SOME COMMUNISTS AND BAATHISTS. IN BETHLEHEM, MAYOR FREIJ APPEARS TO BE IN TROUBLY AND MAY BE DEFEATED BY DEPUTY MAYOR HANNA NASSER.

7. WE HEAR REPORTS THAT THE COMMUNISTS, BUOYED BY THEIR SUCCESS IN ELECTING A MAYOR IN NAZARETH, ARE CAMPAIGNING HARD, INCLUDING DOOR-TO-DOOR SOLICITATION. THIS SEEMS TO BE ESPECIALLY TRUE IN RAMALLAH WHICH AS A REPUTATION AS A CENTER OF RADICALISM. THEY ARE PRESSING THERE FOR A MAXIMUM NUMBER OF PLACES ON THE NATIONALIST SLATE. IT IS REPORTED THAT COMMUNISTS WHO ARE NOT INCLUDED ON THE SLATE WILL RUN AS INDENDENTS. THERE ARE ALSO REPORTS THAT COMMUNISTS ARE ACTIVE IN THE BETHLEHEM AREA AS WELL.

8. BOTH THE ISRAELIS AND CERTAIN WEST BANK NOTABLES HAVE BEGUN TO DISCOUNT THE POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE UPCOMING ELECTIONS. THE ISRAELIS HAVE NOT MADE POLITICAL ANALYSIS EASIER BY BANNING POLITICAL PARTIES AND DEPORTING NATIONALISTS SUCH AS BIR ZEIT'S HANNA NASSER. NABLUS NOTALBE HIKMAT AL-MASRI ALSO RECENTLY SIAD THAT THE ELECTIONS WOULD NOT HAVE SIGNIFICANCE OUTSIDE OF THE MUNICIPALITIES SINCE CITY COUNCILS AND MAYORS HAVE TO CONFINE THEMSELVES TO PROVIDING LOCAL SERIVCES AND WOULD NOT ACCEPT WIDER POWERS. GIVEN THE PROSPECT THAT MANY OF THE MAYORAL FACES MAY NOT CHANGE, INDICATIONS AS TO THE STRENGTH OF
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VARIOUS POLITICAL TENDENCIES ON THE WEST BANK HAVE TO BE DERIVED FROM THE COMPOSITION OF THE NEW MUNICIPAL COUNCILS.

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